ADDRESS,

DELIVERED ON

"DECORATION DAY,"

MAY 30TH, 1872.

AT WILSON, NIAGARA CO., N. Y.

By GEORGE W. COTHRAN,
Late Captain Battery M, 1st N. Y. Light Artillery.

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Fellow Comrades, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Notwithstanding more than a decade has elapsed since that time, how distinctly I remember the day I came to your peaceful and beautiful village in September, 1861. I came a stranger to most of your good citizens; yet I came and appealed to you for that which you held the most near and dear,—for your brothers and your sons, aye, and for your fathers, too. I opened a recruiting office for the purpose of organizing a battery of artillery. A meeting of your people was held in one of your churches. How vividly I remember that occasion and the few remarks I then made. I told you that I appeared before you, not possessed of the eloquence of the orator, to depict, in glowing colors, the dangers and necessities of the times, and to point out what duties it were incumbent on you to perform. On the contrary, I said, "Sufficient for us to know is the fact that the red hand of war has been raised against our country"; and instead of telling you *to go*, I requested you to forget and forego your political preferences and prejudices and *come*, with me, to the war.

The generous, the magnanimous response will never be forgotten. The successful organization of my battery was owing, in a greater degree to the patriotism of the good old town of Wilson, than to any other locality. And in the whole range of our vast armies there were no better, braver, or more faithful soldiers than those who went from your midst. Many and many a time their bravery and efficiency were noticed and commended by our division and corps commanders.

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Your neighboring towns, as well as the patriotic little county of Orleans, contributed largely, in excellent soldiers, to fill up my ranks. My soldiers were generally of such a superior quality, that I will not remember anything derogatory to the characters of the very few who preferred a change of base, and to establish their lines across the Niagara River. No; let the dead past bury its dead. Let our feelings, our recollections, and our sentiments be of a more genial and affectionate character. And I can assure you that while my memory lasts there will always remain the most kindly sentiments toward this generous and patriotic people. The many testimonials of respect, the many encouraging messages that I received from you, are affectionately remembered, and they always will be.

It may be of interest to you, as a matter of local history, to know how I came to undertake the organization of a military company. It will be remembered that during July and August, 1861, it was extremely difficult to induce men to enlist. Already our army had been overthrown at Manassas Gap, and the term of enlistment was increased from three months to three years. Instead of the war furnishing a holiday excursion to the Southern States, as our newspapers had informed us would be the case, we had been taught that the god of war did not always decide in favor of the stronger party—that to overcome a vigilant and determined adversary, organization and efficient action were indispensably necessary.

Impressed with the necessity for an augmentation of our army, I procured authority from the Governor of this State to enlist a company of artillery. On receipt of such authority I communicated the fact to a prominent citizen of

Lockport. He heartily approved of the idea, and insisted that it was the duty of the citizens of Lockport to aid in its organization. It was in the evening, and we were in my office. He went out, and inside of half an hour returned with a notice to the people of Lockport, recommending their cordial co-operation in my enterprise. Appended to it was his name and the names of ten other distinguished citizens, each of whom have been elevated to places of honor and emolument by the votes of the citizens of this county. I thanked him *earnestly*. I felt truly grateful; and yet these eminent gentlemen had at least as deep an interest in the pending struggle as I had.

Half an hour or more elapsed, when another one of those patriotic citizens came into my office. I was pleased to see him. I thanked him for his kind endorsement, but I noticed that he felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. He informed me that he had called in to request me to withhold the publication of the notice for the present. The reason he assigned was that two enterprising young gentlemen were endeavoring to organize a company of cavalry, and if he should publicly endorse an attempt to enlist an artillery company, it might impede the filling up of their ranks.

Somebody in that office was taken aback. Somebody was astounded. That somebody, in the uncharitableness of his heart thought, is it possible that one company of cavalry will supply all the needs of our army? Will the fate of the war be determined by that valiant cavalry company? I replied, "Sir, your wish shall be respected; and for fear that the document might perchance get into the newspapers, I will entrust it to you for safe keeping. He took it, thanked me and withdrew.

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Until that moment I had not fully determined to organize a company, because the sacrifice—the entire destruction of my business, which the assiduous toil of years had drawn to me—must be the inevitable consequence. I had been seriously debating whether I could afford to cast all I had in the world away and leave an aged mother unprotected, but when the door closed behind that honorable and patriotic citizen, my determination was irrevocably fixed. I resolved that if I could not go to the war with their recommendation, I would appeal directly to my friends and fellow-citizens, and go without it. On the very next day my advertisement appeared, and I came to dear old Wilson. Here I found patriotism unmixed with selfishness, and whatever of credit the enterprise is entitled to, Wilson is entitled to the lion's share.

With the exception of the newspaper press of Lockport, that goodly city contributed nothing whatever to the organization of my company, aside from the five young men who joined me and became some of its most distinguished members. To Mr. RICHARDSON, of the *Journal*, and Mr. POMEROY, then of the *Chronicle*, I am under great obligations for the cordial support and sympathy they gave me from the first to the last.

I refer to these matters in no spirit of fault-finding, or discontent. Nor have I a desire to create one feeling of regret nor one pang of remorse. Entertaining no ill-will toward any of God's creatures I came amongst you to-day to again meet my old comrades, who shared with me the privations, the hardships, and the dangers of a soldier's life. It rejoices my heart to meet so many of them. As I cast my eye around me and perceive the glow of health in their

countenances, I sincerely thank God that so many of them have been spared for further occasions of usefulness. While under my command I always felt that I was responsible to your friends, and to God, that your healths and your lives should not be sacrificed through any fault of mine; and when one of our number fell, it lacerated my heart as keenly as though he had been, in fact, my brother. The mutual toils, dangers and privations of a soldier's life create the strongest tie, the closest bond of union, that can exist between men. You who have never undergone what our soldiers underwent, can never appreciate this feeling. The man who stood by me all day under the enemy's fire at Antietam, is my more than brother through life. He has a claim upon my gratitude that will never be protested.

But, my friends, as I cast my eyes over this audience, I look in vain for the cheerful countenances of many an excellent soldier. When I call the names of Lieut. Thomas Hodgkins, of William Cowan, Peter Miller, Clarence Levan, Gerrit Barry, Sergt. David F. Ellicott, Ezra Holden, Charles Hatch, Corp. Simeon Outwater, James Vanbergen, Nelson Bundy, Edwin Trude, Charles Sanford, Martin S. Grout, Sergt. Henry F. Houstater, William O. Hatch, Hiram Rosebush, Christopher Mavvis and Joseph M. Cardinal, the solemn silence of the grave is the only response. Never complaining, but ever faithful and ever true, cheerfully submitting to discipline, and ever prompt in the discharge of their several duties, they were amongst the best soldiers in our army. Sacrificed on the altar of their country! peace to their ashes. May God's blessing rest on them, and on those they left behind them.

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I refer to these fallen heroes, because I knew them and loved them. And if I do not refer by name to other of your citizens who gave their lives in the same hallowed cause, it is not because they are not worthy of the highest enconiums, but because I did not know them. Every soldier who died for his country is deserving of our lasting gratitude.

There is a class in the community at large for whom every soldier entertains the utmost detestation. It is composed of those evil spirits, those human hyenas, who speculated in our soldier's lives, and trafficked in the best blood of the land.

I have always firmly believed, and I still believe that the war was prolonged years after it could and should have been brought to a termination. The primary cause of this unnecessary prolongation was these speculators in human life, that they might grow rich. What cared they for the destruction of human life, for the rivers of precious blood that was shed? What cared they for the wail of the widow or the moan of the fatherless, so long as their selfish ends were accomplished? Intent only on the accumulation of wealth, they were as unconcerned at the terrible consequences of their dastardly conduct as was Nero while Rome was being laid in ashes. What colossal fortunes were made by them, and then what adds insult to injury, they invested those fortunes in government bonds and escaped taxation. Theirs are the most perfectly successful cases of human vampyrage known to the civilized world. Not desiring to call down a malediction on their ignominous heads, I will leave them to Him who hath said: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith ihe Lord" (Romans, 12. 19.)

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The inauguration of the war was largely the work of politicions, the most undeserving and unreliable portion of our population. It was a remarkable fact during the war, that our politicians who were so ferocious for a little blood-letting. "snuffed the battle from afar."

It was sickening to the soldier to observe the parade that was made in the newspapers when a senator from Massachusetts, or from Rhode Island, accepted the command of a regiment. And still more so, when, on arriving at Washington they relinquished their commands, took their seats in the senate chamber, lived on the luxuries of the land, while the poor honest-hearted patriots whom they had induced to enter the army, were ordered to the front to live on hard tack and "fight the intrepid foe."

Disclaiming all intention to descend into the arena of politics, it may nevertheless not be amiss to inquire whether we are in the full enjoyment of the legitimate fruits of the war. Can as great and beneficent results be expected from a dissevered household, as from an united and harmonious one? Have we not too long held the rod of correction over a fallen foe? Do you really believe that holding the rod of correction over your child and keeping him in terrorum for years after you have administered merited chastisement, will tend to improve his temper and render him more cheerful and obedient? Have not your experience and observation taught you that such a course will render him morose and sullen? Will not a child thus governed become incincere and untruthful, and at the first opportunity break through such unjust restraint, and commit greater excesses? If you treat a child with perfidy, will he not reward you with false-

hood? Cannot the most harmless be goaded to that degree of frenzy that he will rise and strike you?

Should you desire to rear a family of children, would you place over them, as their mental tutor and moral guardians, an adventurous vagabond, perchance a fugitive from justice? Were you to do so, what would you expect would be the fruition of your venture? Might you not reasonably expect that your course would result most disastrously to the mental and moral condition of your children? Could aught else be expected?

If you desire to have your offspring respect you and love you and obey you, do you think the best mode to accomplish that result is to withhold from them the things which they need to render them contented and happy—the things which all devoted parents cheerfully accord to their children? Do you, for a moment, believe that a course which tends to debase them, and to elevate their inferiors to the places which they are peculiarly adapted to occupy, will accomplish that result? Do you believe that a course of misrepresentation, of calumny, or fraud and oppression, will do it?

No, my friends, you would do nothing of the kind, nor do we believe anything of the kind; and yet what is true of the child and the family is equally true of the community and of the nation, because the nation is composed of children grown to man's estate.

While I do not attempt to palliate or excuse the monstrous iniquity of those bad and violent men in the southern states who precipitated our peaceful country into a direful civil war that sent Death's dismal visitant to so many of your households, it must be borne in mind that the great mass of the southern people, either drifted or were forced into the

rebellion. Many escaped to the north, while others equally as devoted to the Union, but less fortunate, soon found themselves in arms arrayed against their brethren. While political charlatans and demagogues, for the accomplishment of selfish and unhallowed objects, have defrauded the gallows of its just due, when their armies succumbed, what should our course toward that misguided and rebellious people have been?

The answer comes, not from man's lips, but from Him "who spake as never man spake." "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him;

And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying I repent, *thou shalt forgive him.*" (Luke XVII. 3-4.)

My friends, is it not about time that the animosities, the jealousies and the heart-burnings engendered by the late rebellion should entirely cease? Let not the sun go down on thine anger! Will any of you, if any such there be, who feel inclined to keep alive the vindictive hatred of the past and to inflame and arouse the baser passions of our nature against a portion of our common brotherhood, tell me what great good is to be accomplished by such a course? Does it tend to elevate either you or those whom you denounce and contemn. Does it advance you or them in the scale of civilization? Does keeping alive and aglow the embers of malice and discord and rankling bitterness, make us better or more worthy citizens?

Alas, no! Let us keep pace with the onward march of intelligence and civilization of the age. Let all rancor cease. While forgetting nothing that has past, let us all the

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past forgive. This is the dictate of an enlightened conscience. This is the prompting of Christian civilization.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said. Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy:

"But I say unto you. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." Mat. V. 44-46.

I sincerely thank God that no soldier ever thirsted for the blood of his captive, nor struck a blow at a fallen foe. *That* ignoble act was reserved for a few recreant officers after they became the tools of the vile horde of profligate politicians.

Let us cultivate fraternal relations with all of our people. We want no division. We do not want one section arrayed against another. We want this seething cauldron of political prejudices and vilification to cease. We are a great people, and should be a magnanimous, Christian people. What we want is purification and pacification, and then we will be in the enjoyment of the full fruits of victory. When peace and harmony are restored, and there is no more declaring of martial law for sinister purposes, no more suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* for political ends, and the people, unmolested by extraneous influences, are permitted to select their own rulers, the toils, and the dangers, and the sacrifices of our brave soldiers will not have been in vain. The passage of the recent amnesty bill is a step in the right direction. We want peace and the prosecution of the pursuits of peace. We want an harmonious union and a national brotherhood. The times are auspicious. No longer will men be bound by mere party ties, nor will they, for mere party purposes, approve of measures which their consciences condemn. Be free men. Act conscientiously. Act for your country's good. Act as bravely and nobly as our soldiers acted, and all will be well. Acting thus, speedily will dawn the day that shall find us a united and happy people.

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But, my friends, we have assembled to-day, not to discuss politics nor personalities, but to manifest our respect for the patriot-dead; to give utterance to our profoundest gratitude to the brave and loyal men who upheld our country's flag in the most trying hours of our national existence.

There is no known pecuniary standard by which we can determine the value of the services rendered by those noble patriots who, when the tocsin of war resounded throughout the land with one accord and actuated by but one sentiment, quitted their peaceful avocations, and the quiet happiness of the domestic home circle and went forth to brave the rigors and hazards of desolating war. They were the defenders and preservers of our liberties purchased with the blood of our revolutionary sires.

Unable to compensate them for their services and their sacrifices in any other way, let us ever hold their names and their achievements in grateful and affectionate remembrance.

And while we extend to the survivors of that most sanguinary struggle, which drenched one of the fairest portions of our country with human gore, our most heartfelt gratitude, and pray God to bless them, to-day we bring flowers

to decorate the graves of the fallen heroes, and give expressions, not in feeble words, but in tears drawn from the inmost recesses of our souls, to those deep and inexpressible emotions which pervade our bosoms as we gaze upon the last resting places of those who died that their country might live.

In every civilized community since the world began, certain days have been set apart for praise and thanksgiving, as well as for the commemoration of the greatest achievements of their most worthy and distinguished citizens. What is there in our history, as a nation, more worthy of commemoration than the sacrifices and the heroic exploits of our citizen soldiery? To whom, under God, do we owe a greater debt of gratitude than to them? Who risked so much, who made such ruinous sacrifices as they?

"To be, or not to be, that was the question" then with our magnificent country, whose greatness and prosperity excites our admiration and receives our united exaltation. The parracidal hand had been raised, and the blow that sent a thrill to every heart had been struck. Thenceforth there was but one argument left. Force must be repelled by force. The offender must be overwhelmed, and the fair fabric of our institutions must be preserved and perpetuated.

Like true sons of their illustrious sires, your neighbors, your friends and your kindred, leaving behind them all that they held most near and dear in this world, except their exalted patriotism, went forth to do battle for us. Most heroically did they wrest foul treason from its proud pedestal; most gloriously did they vindicate the majesty of the law.

They triumphed; and the murderous din and carnage of war was hushed. The cruel war was over; but ah, then

came "after the battle." In the din and turmoil of battle, in the heroic and gigantic contest we were carried onward with the tide, and sought but VICTORY. There was no pause, no looking back, no reckoning up of the stupendous cost or the melancholy sacrifice at which it was purchased. Great as was the cost, heart-rending as was the sacrifice, generations yet to be, will rise up and call us blessed and say that the inestimable boon which we hand down to them was more valuable than the mind can conceive.

It is meet that we should rejoice at the splendid achievements of our army and navy. It is eminently proper that we should experience the most lively satisfaction at the inestimable results of the war,—that we should take pride in and venerate those who accomplished so much for us.

While we thus rejoice and honor our great benefactors, we should not close our ears to the agonizing wail of the heart-broken widow, or the plaintive appeal of the grief-stricken orphan. Poor wrecks, thrown upon the tender mercies of a too mercenary world by the calamities of war. Nor should we close our eyes to the diseased and maimed and decrepid forms that fill our streets; relics of former vigorous manhood. These have claims upon us that no mere pecuniary reward can compensate, although it may in a measure alleviate their wants and necessities.

Above all, let us never forget the little green mounds on the hill-side, which denote the last resting-places of the brave and the faithful.

For the widow and the orphan it is our duty to provide. To ameliorate the condition of the poor and crippled soldier was the primary object of the Grand Army of the Republic; and in innumerable instances it has been of great service to

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them. Discharge these duties cheerfully and with a liberal hand, and as you go on prospering in this life, never forget to cast your eye over yonder, where your soldier-kindred lie mouldering in the grave, and ask God's blessing on those who fought, and bled, and died martyrs to their country's cause.

Ah, my friends, this is a solemn theme, a melancholy occasion; an occasion which calls forth the noblest feelings and sentiments of our nature. I remember but a single occasion in the whole span of my life, when my feelings were more deeply moved. I sincerely hope and trust that you may never, never experience the agonizing solemnity of that never-to-be-forgotten moment. Many there are within the sound of my voice who will recall it to mind. It was the night after that dreadful conflict of arms which saved our national capital and expelled the invader from Maryland. It was when the thinned ranks were formed and the roll was called—it was when the faithful sergeant called the names of our true and valiant comrades with whom we had passed through that terrible baptism of fire—it was when he called the name of a brave and intrepid warrior, and the tremulous voice from the ranks, like a voice from the tomb responded, "he's dead."

Death is an awful reality. It causes a pause and a shudder in the most profligate and abandoned. It creates a profound sadness, a tremor in the soul of the upright Christian. It is a solemn thing to stand by the death-bed and watch the tide of life ebb slowly away. We mourn the departure of our near and dear friends; but we have the consolation that they die in a Christian land, surrounded by their friends and will receive a Christian burial. To die is the lot of us

all, and yet the idea of death is surrounded by a mysterious terror.

If such feelings are enkindled in our hearts when our friends, stricken down with disease, or worn out with old age, die, surrounded by all that can conduce to alleviate pain or assuage the terrors of their taking off, should not a higher and a holier feeling be awakened in our bosoms, when we recall the names and the familiar features of those who, in the prime and vigor of robust manhood, in a strange land, and upon war's dessolate field, with no gentle hand to alleviate the wounded body, and no kind voice to calm the departing spirit, yield up their lives for their country and for us. Thus to die is to render the greatest sacrifice that man can render.

All honor to their memory in this vale of tears: and may the portion of the blessed be theirs in the bright and celestial world whence their spirits have flown.

And to those blessed spirits high in the realms of endless day, I waft my saddest, fondest farewell.

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